



Jacob Birch



Cherissma Costelloe



Corey Janvier



Lee Arna Nepia



Angel Ward



Renata Watene

# GROUP 3

# THREE LANDS & FOUR OCEANS

The seven pillars of  
Indigenous self-  
determination

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For the Indigenous peoples of three lands and four oceans – Australia, Canada, and New Zealand – self-determination is the ultimate aspiration. Achieving self-determination will be a long and complex process. Fundamental to this process is Indigenous peoples having the authority to make decisions on matters that relate to us on our lands.

As Indigenous peoples, we see all things interconnected and relational. Therefore, addressing the matter of self-determination requires holistic thinking. Using the metaphor of the Aboriginal practice of drawing in the sand to convey complex ideas, the authors of this brief drew seven campfires in the sand –

**1** Culture, heritage & language

**2** Health

**3** Youth

**4** Housing

**5** Capital access and economic development

**6** Climate change, land & resources

**7** Governance – that will lead us to our big camp: self-determination



From sitting around these campfires, we propose one clear recommendation:

**Establish an international collaborative group of Indigenous peoples from the three lands to continue developing policy and advocacy - and five secondary recommendations:**

- **Establish an Indigenous health authority to be a voice for health and healing.**
- **Establish a voice for capital access and economic development.**
- **Establish a voice for traditional ecological knowledge.**
- **Establish a voice for youth.**
- **Establish an Indigenous language commission agency.**



# PURPOSE

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) was adopted by the General Assembly in 2007 and supported by 143 Member States. However, four Member States voted against UNDRIP, including Australia, Canada, and New Zealand. While these three nations now support UNDRIP, it provides a clear example of the shared colonial history and challenges faced by Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, First Nations, Métis, Inuk, and Māori peoples on the path to self-determination.

Self-determination and self-governance are fundamental Human Rights for Indigenous people under Articles 3 and 4 of UNDRIP. However, Indigenous peoples have long been treated paternalistically by government and non-government organizations and have suffered under assimilationist strategies. This has negatively impacted the ability of Indigenous peoples to exert self-governance.

Under this system, Indigenous peoples suffer disproportionately. Compared to non-Indigenous people, Indigenous peoples have poorer health, higher rates of incarceration and violence, less meaningful education and employment outcomes, less secure housing and home ownership, and less inherited wealth and access to capital. Despite these struggles, Indigenous peoples grapple with maintaining and reclaiming culture, language, and heritage while fighting for ancestral homelands and sitting on the frontlines to protect the planet for future generations.





# CRITICAL ANALYSIS

The authors of this brief have taken strengths- and opportunities-based approaches to analyzing the seven campfires that have informed the recommendations of this brief.

## 1 Culture, Heritage, and Language

Maintaining culture, heritage, and language (culture) gives Indigenous peoples identity, inner strength, and purpose. Indigenous culture is a celebration of the diversity of the human family and offers knowledge and perspectives that enrich all people's lives. Culture connects us physically and spiritually to our lands and oceans. Our place-based identities allow for place-based opportunities and solutions that are strengths-oriented and reflective of the local context.

## 2 Health

Indigenous peoples were healthy and thriving before colonization. Established models of healthcare existed before colonization, and the frameworks still exist in the three Lands. Indigenous peoples take a holistic approach to health care, modeling intergenerational, community-informed outcomes that enhance internal strength and promote self-determination.

## 3 Youth

Young people want to be in environments that create a sense of personal and collective connection, a place where they belong. They are looking for environments that encourage self-efficacy and where they are safe and free from judgment and stigma. Our youth are energetic, optimistic, educated, passionate, and future leaders.

## 4 Housing

When Indigenous peoples have housing security, the social impact extends to the broader community. This is because one secure household will become a safe space and refuge for relatives and extended family who may be transient, displaced, or at risk of domestic violence, etc. Creating opportunities for Indigenous peoples to build on their ancestral lands will enhance their internal strength and spirit.

## 5 Capital Access and Economic Development

The social impact per dollar is much higher for Indigenous businesses compared to mainstream businesses. This is because Indigenous peoples have an entrepreneurial spirit, usually starting enterprises to address a gap within their community or to provide opportunities for their community.

## 6 Climate Change, Land & Resources

We have co-evolved with our landscapes and survived extreme climatic events, including ice ages. There is considerable strength in engaging this knowledge to adapt, survive, thrive, and even prevent the repeating of climatic upheaval. We have an intergenerational perspective and bring food, fibre, and medicine into abundance through our land management practices. However, our knowledge comes with values that must be understood and embraced.

## 7 Governance

Well-established systems of governance existed for millennia in all three lands. Indigenous governance, by our values, will benefit all peoples. This is because we inherently make decisions for future generations and try to bring all people into our circle of relationality. We do not see ourselves as separate from society, as living in isolation, but as an integral part.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

**1** Support establishing an **international collaborative** working group of Indigenous peoples from the three lands to develop a voice for policy and advocacy at the governance level that speaks across the three lands with a collective voice of solidarity.

**2** Support the establishment of a **funded independent** Indigenous health authority across the three lands to advocate and promote Indigenous health and healing aspirations.

This recommendation supports the Housing, Health, and Youth campfires. For example, an Indigenous working group would look at Indigenous youth in detention facilities and say these youth need to be healed, not locked away.

**3** Support the establishment of an **Indigenous voice** across the three lands to advocate and promote support for **Indigenous enterprises, entrepreneurs,** and **economic development** initiatives that support nation-building activities.

This recommendation supports the Governance and Capital access campfires. For example, make capital available and provide government support for sustainable projects, such as sustainable timber harvesting industries that remove invasive species.

# CONT...

- 4 Support establishing an Indigenous voice for **traditional ecological knowledge** at the governance level across the three lands.

This recommendation supports Climate change and Culture campfires. For example, to better understand and prepare for extreme changes, we can learn from one another how to manage our environment.

- 5 Support the establishment of an Indigenous **youth advisory** council to discuss these seven campfires and develop a voice for youth.

This recommendation supports all seven campfires. Youth are looking for opportunities to be productive citizens in their communities and contribute their ideas. They want to be active and engaged with learning & sharing culture, heritage, and language with each other.

- 6 Support the establishment of an **Indigenous Language Commission** Agency in all three lands.

This recommendation supports the Language, culture & heritage campfire. For example, the agency would be responsible for Indigenous language strategy and revitalization.